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Ex-CIA director Casey dies

Probe viewed as largely unaffected

Former director of central intelligence William J. Casey died of pneumonia yesterday at 74. He resigned as CIA director Feb. 2 following removal of a cancerous tumor from his brain last December. Obituary, Page 51.

By Thomas Palmer
Globe Staff

WASHINGTON - The death of former CIA director William J. Casey, whose role in the Iran-contra affair is now known to have been much greater than was apparent when the news broke late last year, will not significantly hinder the investigation, members of Congress and aides said yesterday.

"What did he know that no one else knew?" said one congressional aide. "Nothing."

Sen. Warren B. Rudman (R-N.H.), vice chairman of the Senate Select Committee probing the scandal, said yesterday that some details of what happened - now being recounted by participants in public hearings on Capitol Hill - may have died with Casey, but none would have been significant.

Last November, Casey testified before the Senate Intelligence Committee concerning the US arms sales to Iran, which had just been disclosed. Casey was hospitalized with a brain tumor three weeks later.

On Tuesday, after Senate and House select committees have spent months investigating the Iran arms sales and diversion of proceeds to the contra cause, joint public hearings began. Casey died early the next morning.

The longtime, trusted friend of President Reagan was suffering from a cancerous tumor and also reportedly had had prostate cancer. He apparently had been far too ill since his Nov. 21, 1986, testimony to relate what he knew about the Iran-contra affair.

Oliver L. North, the National Security Council aide who was fired a few days after Casey's testimony, was at first portrayed in news stories as the mastermind of the contra supply diversion. But it

has surfaced that North was in effect working for Casey.

When Casey testified before the Senate Intelligence Committee, the committee's report of last January noted "He did not mention any possibility that there had been a diversion of funds from the arms sales to Iran." Casey was later criticized both for that omission and for not informing Congress of the arms sale initiative for 15 months - until after it was revealed in the press.

When a newsman shouted the question about whether any laws were broken, Casey - in a news clip that has become famous by its being played and replayed on television - responded, "No, no."

What is certainly clear now is that some laws were broken. There have been two indictments, the second of which was announced only yesterday. Casey could have enlightened both the special prosecutor investigating the scandal and the select committees' investigators had his health not deteriorated.

"There are some things he will take with him to the grave," said Sen. Patrick J. Leahy (D-Vt.), who was vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee when the scandal erupted.

One area in which Casey might have yielded some understanding is the solicitation of the Sultan of Brunei for \$10 million in assistance to the contras. Former Air Force Maj. Gen. Richard V. Secord, the first witness in the public hearings, testified Tuesday that Casey said he would ask Secretary of State George P. Shultz to approach the sultan.

According to Secord, the money was destined for military purposes. For a US official to have been involved in supplying such aid would apparently have been a violation of the Boland Amendment, which was in effect then and prohibited US military aid to the rebels in Nicaragua. Shultz won the \$10 million contribution, but he told the House Foreign Affairs Committee last December



WILLIAM J. CASEY
Was criticized for omissions

that he thought the money was for humanitarian aid, which was not prohibited.

One source close to the congressional investigation noted that Casey left a faint trail. "Casey was not the kind to scribble, the way Colonel North did," the source said in an interview before Casey's death. "When he had a phone call with somebody he had had business dealings with, he would not write a memo." The source added that Casey worked on his own to a large extent in the Iran-contra effort, that he liked to carry out "vest-pocket operations."

Foresaw problem

Rudman said investigators foresaw the problem with Casey's health. "With regard to the Iran committee's ongoing investigation, since director Casey had become ill some time ago, we had anticipated he would not be able to appear as a witness," Rudman said. "The committee therefore has been proceeding independently to gather evidence as to what his role and that of the agency might have been."

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Casey and North appear to have been the two Reagan administration officials most involved in the matter. Since it is not yet assured that North will testify, the full effect of Casey's death cannot be known.

Although Casey was well enough to be discharged from the hospital after his surgery, none of the investigators ever spoke with him. Sen. Daniel K. Inouye (D-Hawaii) said recently that the committee would seek independent evidence that Casey was physically unable to contribute.

"That never happened," said Lance Morgan, spokesman for the Senate Select Committee.

Morgan said there was a "significant paper trail" revealing much of what Casey would have known and that many witnesses were interviewed concerning his role. "We will not have any significant holes in the story," he said.